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ABSTRACT

Psychologists and educators have struggled to understand the devastating influence of racial intolerance on children, on their personality development, and on their academic growth. The emotional and cognitive elements that underlie racial intolerance, along with its theoretical underpinnings, are examined in this paper. It is believed that five factors shaped the evolution of intolerance: (1) prejudice, which includes the desire for rigidity in the social order; (2) racial identity, or the way in which a child constructs a view of self as a racial person; (3) worthlessness, or self-loathing; (4) distrust arising from the breaching of expected interactions; and (5) cultural world view, or the way a child makes sense of everyday things. All of these elements are discussed within the developmental context. It is argued that racial intolerance manifests itself in a variety of self-defeating and psychologically harming ways for children. Such children are insecure and uncertain about the value of cultural difference. School psychologists must take leadership in helping schools address issues of racial intolerance and prejudice; five redefined roles for school psychologists are outlined: (1) identify the developmental markers of racial identity; (2) develop testing and lifestyle protocols for early identification of racial intolerance; (3) develop effective systemic treatment strategies; (4) learn new consultation roles; (5) accommodate culturally and racially diverse family systems. School professionals are challenged to redefine their existing roles in culturally sensitive ways so that they can support children grappling with racial acceptance and racial self-liking. (RJM)

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Running head: RACIAL INTOLERANCE IN CHILDREN

Emotional and Cognitive Antecedents of Racial intolerance

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Abstract

Racial intolerance is a difficult subject in American schools. School psychologists and other educators all have struggled to understand its devastating influence on children and their personality development and academic growth. This paper examines the emotional and cognitive elements that underlie racial intolerance. Five factors are believed to have significance in the evolution of intolerance: prejudice; racial identity; worthlessness, distrust, and cultural world view. These elements are discussed within the developmental context. Redefined school psychologists' roles are needed to address racial intolerance. Five redefined roles for school psychologists are noted. Suggestions for school based interventions are highlighted.

Emotional and cognitive antecedents of racial intolerance

Racial intolerance is a formidable opponent facing school psychologists today. It influences the everyday learning experiences of children, shapes their classrooms and molds school environments. Cognitive and affective development occur within school learning environments and across communities where racial intolerance, prejudice, and racial misunderstanding all flourish.

School psychologists know all too well the harsh reality of racial intolerance. They see the children who have been victimized by the injustice of racism and tormented by racial intolerance and they observe the young perpetrators of these injustices. Without question, both children are wounded psychologically and scarred emotionally by racial intolerance.

The critical and ever widening challenge for school psychologists today is to determine how to remove racial intolerance from America's schools. School psychologists ponder several ethical dilemmas as they wrestle with this professional issue. *How do we help children heal from this societal and educational trauma? How do we prevent other children from falling victim to racial intolerance? How do schools rid themselves of this "unwanted" class subject - racial intolerance - so that schools are not longer affected and classrooms are no longer shaped by its despair?* Answers to these questions form the basis of this discussion.

Guided by moral conviction and armed with ethical imperatives, school psychologists must address this classroom dilemma now. The National Association of School Psychologist in 1993 adopted a position statement that supports school psychologists as they tackle this educational and academic problem. In this statement, they write, "The National Association of School

Psychologists is committed to promoting the rights, welfare, educational and mental health needs of all students. This task can be accomplished only within a society that ensures all persons, including children and youth, are treated equitably and without regard to race, ethnicity, religion, culture or gender. NASP believes that racism, prejudice, and discrimination are harmful to children and youth because they can have a profoundly negative impact on school achievement, self-esteem, personal growth, and ultimately, the welfare of all American society. . . "

The statement concludes with this directive, ". . . it is our charge to understand the effects of racism, discrimination, and prejudice - how they impact on our own performance as school psychologists and how they affect every facet of the lives of children in America. The practice of school psychology must be informed by this knowledge and understanding, and NASP believes that school psychologists have a critical role to play in the making schools culturally sensitive environments. Ultimately, the welfare of all students - and our nation - is at stake" (1993).

This position statement, asks school psychologists to take responsibility for recognizing when racial intolerance, prejudice, and racism are present within the school environment. Secondly, it charges them to seek methods to eradicate racial intolerance from within the schools, to purge it from the individual and collective minds of our children and to remove it from those who serve them.

Taking into account this ethical imperative, this paper tackles racial intolerance by characterizing its emotional and cognitive components. How does racial intolerance manifest itself in young children's' minds and experiences? What are the emotional side effects of intolerance within a school setting? What can school psychologists do to effect changes that weaken racial intolerance? These and related professional issues concerning racial intolerance are examined

within an educational, psychological, and scientific context.

Theoretical framework

The work of the noted psychiatrist Alfred Adler sheds light on this discussion of racial intolerance. According to Adlerian theory, people are social, creative, decision making beings who have a unified purpose (Sherman & Dinkmeyer, 1987 cited in Corey, 1991). They strive for perfection while trying to cope with inferiority. The moment we experience inferiority, we are pulled by the striving for superiority. This concept does not imply that one means being *superior* to others; rather, it suggests attaining a greater degree of one's own potential. The goal of success pulls people forward toward mastery and enables them to overcome obstacles. Achievement superiority contributes to the development of human community.

Using this theoretical framework, it can be argued that the racially intolerant person is experiencing inferiority, and has failed to accomplish those tasks that demonstrate a *striving for perfection or superiority*. Instead, the racially intolerant person has been overcome with inferiority feelings, and has become "discouraged". This individual has not attempted to compensate for the inferiority feelings and has stopped trying to compensate with superiority. Instead, the intolerant person compensates by seeking to make him/herself feel superior by putting down or degrading those who are culturally different. The intolerant person feels better because he/she has snatched personal power from the individual who was berated. This type of power is weak and does not endure across time. Nonetheless, it gives the racially intolerant person one moment of "perceived power and influence."

Critical to school psychologists' understanding of racial intolerance is recognizing the importance of *social interest* in the discussion of racial intolerance. In Adler's schema. *Social*

interest or *gemeinschaftsgeful* refers to an individual's awareness of being a part of the human community (Corey, 1991) and to the person's attitudes in dealing with the social world (p. 140). This socialization process begins early in childhood and involves finding a place in one's society and acquiring a sense of belonging and of contribution (Kefir, 1981).

The relationship of social interest to notions of racial intolerance becomes apparent as one fully understands its importance to a child's overall growth and development. Social interest is equated with a sense of identification and empathy with others. In other words, the degree to which one shares successfully with others and is concerned about the welfare of others becomes an important measure of mental health (Sherman & Dinkmeyer, 1987, p. 12). As social interest develops, feelings of inferiority and alienation disappear. Since social interest can be taught and is learned through shared activity and mutual respect, its role in everyday learning is apparent. Effective mastery of social interest can influence one's view of [and acceptance] for culturally different persons. Those who have failed to master social interest become "discouraged", feel inferior, become alienated, and have no respect for "difference". Within this context of failed learning and discouragement, seeds of racial intolerance attached themselves to children.

Racial intolerance becomes a developmental marker along a continuum ranging from racial acceptance at one end to racism and ultimately, genocide at the opposite end. Within this context, racial intolerance is believed to be comprised of a set of emotional, affective, and cognitive factors that together, support a person's dislike of individuals who are racially, culturally, or ethically different from the dominant [mainstream] cultural group. Exactly what are those factors and how they flourish within school settings is unknown. Of those possible contributing factors, five are significant: prejudice, worthlessness, distrust, world view and racial

identity. A short description of each follows.

Prejudice

The concept of prejudice has been assigned to race only in recent history (Allport, 1979). Earlier, prejudice had been assigned to religious differences (Allport, 1979). When religion lost its potency and influence in the 19th century, race then became the issue largely because it was simplistic and immediately visible marker by which to discriminate victims of dislike. (Allport, 1954/1979, p. xviii).

Prejudice, as its word implies, involves a prejudgement, an intensity of belief, and an inflexible support for that belief, even when new knowledge demonstrates its inappropriateness or inaccuracy (Bryant, 1994). Containing irrationality, prejudice embodies a failure to recognize shared humanity. In ethnic and/or racial prejudice, the biased individual categorizes people and their actions based on rigid criteria. Resorting to rationalizations to justify the prejudice and actions, the prejudiced adult argues that he/she is expressing what [large] groups of others are themselves feeling, but simply cannot express.

Persons who are prejudiced and racially intolerance have characteristics marked by rigidity and conflict (Bryant, 1994). These characteristics vary across individual and situations. However, several characteristics or attributes are common to prejudiced persons:

- Desire rigidity in one's social order, family structure, institutions, and behaviors.
- Advocate strict moralism which often supports their prejudice.
- Has tunnel vision, and focuses only on that aspect of life that disrupts their vision of their own status.
- Seeks power over others to combat their own sense of powerlessness.

- Easily frustrated, especially by events which seem to undermine their perception of status quo.
- Shows increasingly aggressive and often full hatred toward individuals and institutions that appear to threaten their way of life.
- Unable to evaluate their own behavior objectively. Projects faults, feelings of anger and violence. Places blame for failure and inappropriate acts to outside forces [who are often the targets of their prejudice and intolerance].
- Require social structures and learning/work situations which require structure and conformity.
- Explains their irrational views of their prejudice by using half truths, distortions, circuitous arguments, and other 'logical" tools.
- Distrustful of anyone who disagrees with their beliefs, accusing them of colluding with the target group (Bryant, 1994, p. 24-5).

In summary, prejudice supports dislike and non acceptance. Racially intolerant people use this framework of prejudice to build their moral case for disapproval of anyone who does not fit a dominant culture belief. In the years to come, researchers and scientists are likely to confirm the significance of prejudice as a causal factor in the etiology of racial intolerance.

World view

Simply speaking, world view is described as the way in which a person makes sense of things in one's everyday life (Ivey, Ivey, & Simek-Morgan, 1993). How one makes sense of the world is determined by how an individual assigns meaning in that world. While each individual has an unique world view, the meanings underlying a person's world view are based upon

universal human qualities (e.g. belief in the goodness of humankind).

Four foundational elements are thought to comprise the building blocks of a world view: individual, family, multicultural, and universal (Ivey et.al, 1993, p. 7-8). Attitudes toward issues of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, aging, and disability are influenced by our experiences within our families and to a lesser extent, our communities (Ivey et.al., 1993, p. 7-8).

Racially biased and intolerant persons are thought to possess an incomplete world view. Intolerant persons have failed to develop one of the four building blocks necessary for effective world view development. The multiple lens through which a multicultural world view evolves has become clouded by ambiguity and disenfranchisement. Such individuals experience frustration and failure - because they are unable to accomplish meaningful tasks or achieve superiority, in Adlerian terminology. Intolerant persons have lost all belief in the "goodness" of humankind [if ever they had such a belief].

Racially intolerant persons reject the idea of multiple realities and multiple solutions to problems, a basic tenet of multiculturalism. Sue (1991) cautions it is dangerous to believe there is only one pathway to healthy mental or emotional health. Instead, a healthy multicultural person does in fact believe in multiple truths and multiple realities in everyday practice.

Racially intolerant persons are far too rigid and dogmatic to trust the possibility of multiple "right " answers. Moreover, they are puzzled by [and suspicious of] the notion of their being multiple realities in a single problem. Such persons are limited in their understanding of their own cultural world view and show no willingness to expose themselves to world views other than their own.

Worthlessness

Worthlessness is a significant risk factor within a number of psychological disorders . in adults and children (e.g. depression, suicide, dysthymia, bipolar disorders, post traumatic stress disorder and so forth). Worthlessness reduces one's psychic energy thereby reducing a person's willingness to try new tasks. It restricts risk taking abilities, and reduces one's acceptance of change. If it is left unchecked, worthlessness spirals downward to hopelessness and despair, which are two of the most prominent suicide risk factors in adolescent and adult suicide (American Psychiatric Association, 1994, 4th edition).

Worthlessness infers a self-disliking or self-loathing. When conjoined with low self-esteem, worthlessness diminishes one's appreciation for one's own racial group. If a person does not value his/her own racial group, then it is doubtful that person tolerate anyone who is demographically differently. Moreover, because worthlessness intensifies feelings of failure, children who have such feelings find it difficult to take risks when learning new ideas and have trouble adjusting to new [culturally different] individuals.

In short, worthlessness reduces a child's motivation to try out new [and different] life experiences. Under such conditions, racial rigidity can flourish allowing racial intolerance to take root. Worthlessness intensifies one's disliking for self and for others. It reduces hopefulness about the future and one's role in it.

Racial Identity

The developmental process surrounding the issues of race may be viewed as describing the concept of racial identity (Helms, 1984). Racial identity theories (e.g. Helms, 1984) have been used to help understand how persons of color and White people understand and process issues of race and cultural difference. For Whites, the key developmental issue is the abandonment of

entitlement [of societal privileges] (Helms, 1995) while for persons of color, it is managing internalized racism and its various manifestations. Development occurs either by evolution or differentiation of successive racial identity *statuses*, which are defined as ". . . the dynamic cognitive, emotional, and behavioral processes that govern a person's interpretation of racial information in her or his interpersonal environments " (Helms, 1995, p. 184). Statuses lead to the creation of developmental schema, ie. behavioral manifestations of the underlying statuses. These schemata are presumed to be measured by various racial identity attitude inventories (e.g. Helms & Carter, 1990).

Statuses, according to Helms, are thought to develop or mature sequentially and are expressed according to its dominance within the person's personality structure. Maturity is determined not only by whether a status has evolved within the ego (Helms, 1995), but whether it is strong enough to be called upon to assist the person in coping with or in managing everyday racial material. *Dominance* describes the status that typically characterizes the person's racial reactions (Helms, 1995, p.184). *Accessibility*, on the other hand, is concerned with whether a status is strong enough to permit the person to react in a status relevant manner (Helms, 1995. p. 184-5).

In short, maturation, according to Helms (1995), is triggered by need. As the child encounters personally meaningful racial material and is unable to cope with the event, new schemata may be created [out of necessity]. Each time the child is exposed to a racial event or perceives an event as racial, the ego selects the dominant racial status to help the child interpret or understand the racial life event. Once an event is interpreted, the schemata then responds in ways that are consistent with the characteristics of the status and protects the child's well-being. Helms

posits that most persons have a dominant status (1995). Secondary statuses are present, also in the racial part of the child's personality construction. If the dominant schemata fails to understand the racial life event, the person's coping mechanisms refer back to an earlier schemata that has worked earlier. The adaptation continues until the child finds a schemata that allows the child to function in or psychologically survive the racial life event.

Of what relevance is racial identity ego status to racial intolerance? From a developmental perspective, it would seem that racial intolerance represents a child's failure to mature in one area of development or information processing. It is posited that the racially intolerant child [or adult] has been unsuccessful in using an existing schemata to understand a racial life event and thus reverts to an earlier schemata. In Helms' White Racial Ego Status and Information Processing Strategies (IPS) *Contact* status is the earliest category of development (Helms, 1994a, 1994b).

In the *contact status*, the child has satisfaction with racial status quo, is oblivious to racism, and one's participation in it. If racial factors influence life decisions, they do so in a naive or simplistic manner. The information processing strategy is obliviousness. The adult in this stage believes things in the community should remain "as they were". In a school environment, this belief might be translated to mean that the adult wants school classroom activities to be defined by the dominant culture only. This *contact status* adult would not favor multicultualism or bilingual education, but would support an English only school initiative.

In summary, racial identity influences how a child constructs a view of self as a racial person. Racial identity is believed, according to Helms, to be an integral part of ego personality development. Racial intolerance represent stunted development in that part of the personality which manages racial identity statuses or constructs. It represents an aspect of self and

development which scientists and educators are most unfamiliar and signals an area for children's growth and development for investigation and research in the years to come.

Distrust

Schools promote healthy child interactions and model appropriate adult interactions for their young children and youth. However, when such expected [and promised] interactions are breached, children experience uncertainty and distrust in the adults involved, in the situation surrounding the breach, and doubt themselves. Distrust is a breach of faith within a trusted [and valued] interaction or relationship.

Children handle distrust in several ways. They may internalize the distrust as self-doubt. Children doubt themselves and their abilities to make decisions for themselves. They doubt their ability to judge people and situations effectively. As a result, such individuals may engage in a "fight or flight response"as a coping and survival mechanism. Children will run away from distrustful [unfamiliar] situations in order to protect themselves. While there are times when it is best to evoke a fight or flight response, it is not always a productive response.

Individuals who distrust others, their relationships, and themselves are not open to exploring new relationships with persons who are culturally, racially, or otherwise " different" than they because they fear they will be harmed. They have learned only one way to handle unknown situation - fight or flight. As a result, new, strange, and [culturally] different persons are viewed with skepticism and reservation. Culturally or racially different persons are subject to disapproval by those persons who have distrust. The distrustful child is closed and unwilling to accept [or tolerate] racial difference in peers and others because they do not look like the dominant cultural group whom he/she believes sets the norm. This reality becomes a "no-growth

- no win" arrangement and the distrusting, racially intolerant child loses in this game.

Racial Intolerance in Children

Recognizing racial intolerance and its beginnings in young children and adolescents is not an easy task. It is necessary, however that school psychologists begin to identify elements of intolerance in children. *What would these elements look like when seen in children? What behaviors are important to observe in children? How would these behaviors be exhibited in classroom and other learning environments?* Racial intolerance characteristics include the following behaviors and expressions:

- Verbal comments about a particular racial or cultural group, especially comments that are derogatory or denigrating (e.g. "Nigger", "Chink"; Honky").
- Expressed unwillingness to be in proximity with persons of color. Moves desk away from culturally or racially different children.
- Repeating derogatory comments from parents or authority figures (e.g. My mother said all Blacks were evil).
- Taunts or picks at children of color in class, at lunch, and during play.
- Shows open dislike for hearing stories or participating in activities with a racial or cultural theme. [refusal to participate in MLK day programs or activities]
- Racial denigration themes are evidenced in writings especially projective activities.
- Associates with students who exhibit racial or cultural bias practices.
- Shows outward expressions of anger toward professionals of color.
- Wears clothes that have racial symbols on them (e.g. Wearing hat with rebel flag).

These behaviors and actions reflect a confused and troubled child, whose emotional

turmoil is framed as racial hate and dislike. School psychologists are challenged to design school and family interventions which arrest this developmental delay while helping these children expand their understanding of and appreciation for cultural and racial difference. Accomplishing these tasks requires school psychologists to develop innovative new roles and duties.

Redefined Roles for School Psychologists

School psychologists must take the leadership in helping schools address issues of racial intolerance and prejudice. They have an ethical and moral responsibility to help these students and clients learn to appreciate racial differences and value cultural world views. In order to assume this leadership imperative, what new roles must school psychologists assume? Five redefined roles are critical to children's success in learning racial tolerance.

1. As specialists in testing and assessment of school children, school psychologists can assume responsibility for *identifying the developmental markers of racial identity* development in children and creating assessment measures to identify such growth.

What are the developmental markers of healthy racial identity development in children? What behavioral and emotional shifts are indicators of racial dislike? Which cognitive markers reflect growth toward a health cultural world view? School psychology practitioners must join with universities, their teaching faculty, and test publishers to create and empirically validate new measures to assess growth in racial identity and other factors pertaining to racial development.

2. Develop testing and lifestyle *protocols for early identification of racial intolerance*. Schools are the logical place for developing protocols which identify risk factors for developing racial intolerance in children. School psychologists, as assessment and consultation experts within the schools, have a significant leadership role in the development of such protocols. Early

identification targets problem behaviors early before such behaviors become out of control. School psychologists need to replicate and extend research on early identification protocols to help schools identify racial intolerance and other societal disrespectful practices.

3. Once early identification protocols are develops and risk factors are identified, the logical next step is the *development of effective systemic treatment strategies* for helping racially rigid and dogmatic children learn racial acceptance. One of the basic tenets of the NASP ethics code is ". . . school psychologists will advocate for their students/clients".

This obligation necessitates that school psychologists 'speak up' for the needs and rights of their students/clients at time when it may be difficult to do so (NASP principles for professional practice, Introduction section, 1993). " This ethical directive challenges school psychologists to "speak up" about racism and other forms of harassment and prejudice.

4. School psychologists must learn *new consultation roles* - ones which help them to become advocate/consultants to remove racism and racial intolerance from schools. School organizational consultants are needed: (a) to examine school organizational climate; (b) to identify organizational racial intolerance dimensions, and © to create developmentally sound organizational policies to manage intolerance. School psychologists must take the leadership to change the racist and racially intolerant school practices, policies, and implementation strategies that permeate American schools within both" money -poor" and "money -rich" districts and academies.

The school psychologists who remarks," I am just supposed to evaluate [or reevaluate] this child" is sticking one's professional head in the sand. Such a naive comment could imply collusion with an oppressive [and often racially intolerant] school system. Collusion with an

oppressive system harms the child and thus, is likely unethical for the practitioner, according the NASP ethics (E.3; A.2) (National Association of School Psychologists, 1993) .

5. School psychologists with training in family systems interventions must retool and update their skills to *accommodate culturally and racially diverse family systems*" - culturally blended families, biracial family units, and racially intolerant family systems. No longer is it practical to take a dominant culture family systems model and "colorize" [apologies to Ted Turner] it for an African American or Native American family unit. In the future it could be unethical for any school psychologist to remain culturally uninformed. School psychologists simply must accept the challenge to learn new family systems interventions which truly "fit" racially different, biracial, culturally blended, and other culturally rich families. For many practicing professionals, a return to the classroom or a continuing education workshop is required if they are to retool properly. Universities and training programs must, similarly, revise their curricula to accommodate these culturally rich family needs. These families pose new professional challenges for schools, school psychologists, and training programs alike.

Summary

Racial intolerance manifests itself in a variety of self-defeating and psychologically harming ways for children. They are insecure and uncertain how they value cultural difference. Always seeking to improve their self-worth, they "borrow " feelings of liking and worth from others, but achieve this fusion by degrading others who are culturally different from they. Children learn racial intolerance early in their development and then later it is reinforced within our schools, our homes and across our neighborhoods. School psychologists have a leadership role in helping these children learn new ways of valuing racial and cultural difference while

learning to treasure their own cultural roots. School psychologists are challenged to redefine their existing professional roles in culturally sensitive ways so they can support children as they master an important developmental life task - that of racial acceptance and racial self-liking. These redefined school psychology roles place school psychologists in the forefront and prepared for the global, multicultural world of the 21st century.

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